

## **Questions to Ask Your Doctor when diagnosed with Cancer or a serious illness**

When you receive a diagnosis of cancer, congestive heart failure (CHF), COPD, or any other serious illness, it can be very hard to think clearly on the spot. In such a situation, **try not to be preoccupied with asking all the “right” questions immediately.**

### **Here are some questions that can help with your conversation**

#### ***1. Can you tell me that again?***

It is completely normal not to be able to take in everything that you are told. Whether it is at the same appointment or at the next one, it can be helpful to ask for the information to be repeated to make sure you understand what your doctor is telling you.

#### ***2. Can I say that back to you, so I know that I understand what you are telling me?***

Studies show that in many cases doctors believe they are clearly and fully explaining a diagnosis, while the patient only has a partial or incorrect understanding of the information after the appointment. Ask your doctor if you can repeat your understanding of the conversation in your own words to make sure you fully understand everything.

#### ***3. What do we do next?***

Knowing what comes next can often relieve your anxiety. Work with your doctor to get a sense of the plan.

- What are the next steps?
- When should you see the doctor next?
- Are there more tests that need to be done before the next visit?

#### ***4. Do you need a referral to a specialist? Do you need a second/more expert opinion?***

In most cases, there are very good treatments that can cure your disease and your doctor can tell you about them. In some cases, when treatments are complicated, you will need second opinions.

#### ***5. How serious is this?***

**But remember that not everyone wants to know the answer to this question – so doctors may not always tell you unless you ask.** Also remember that if you are a family member who hears a diagnosis with a loved one, he or she may not want to know the answer (and vice-versa). So sometimes it is important to first ask yourself, “How much do I want to know now?”

#### ***6. What else should I be asking at this point?***

This kind of open-ended question lets your doctor to give you information that you might not think to ask. Many times it is difficult to think on the spot, so you may need help with asking more questions.

## Remember:

- This is a stressful time, and it is normal to forget things. **Write down what your doctor says.** Then, when you get home, **write down questions you and your family have about the diagnosis.** If you are the patient and you went to the appointment alone, it is a good idea to take a loved one with you next time – both for emotional support as well as to help you understand and remember what the doctor says.
- ***And don't forget that you should ask for palliative care if you are experiencing symptoms and stress due to your illness or the side effects of treatment. Early is best.***